

Quick Facts

About...Scarlet Fever

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever (sometimes called scarletina) is caused by Group A streptococcus (GAS) bacteria, the same bacteria that cause strep throat. Scarlet fever is a rash illness that sometimes occurs in people who have strep throat. Once considered a serious childhood disease, scarlet fever is now less threatening due to the availability of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

What are the signs of being sick with scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is characterized by:

- Sore throat that can be very sore with white or yellowish patches, making it difficult to swallow. This is normally the first symptom to occur.
- Red rash that looks like a sunburn and feels like sandpaper. The rash usually begins on the second day of the illness. It first appears on the chest and stomach and then spreads to the neck, arms, and legs. The rash is usually redder in the armpits and groin area. The rash does not appear on the face, palms of hands, or soles of feet.
- Fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or higher is common.
- The tongue appears red and bumpy, making it look like a strawberry, and is often covered with a white coating early in the course of the illness.
- Enlarged glands in the neck.
- Nausea, vomiting, and headache.

How is scarlet fever spread?

Strep bacteria are spread from person to person through direct contact with fluids from the throat or nose of persons who are infected or by hands that have GAS on them. If an infected person coughs or sneezes, the bacteria can become airborne and spread infection to others. The bacteria can also survive on objects such as drinking glasses, eating utensils, and doorknobs for a short period of time.

How is scarlet fever diagnosed?

Your health care provider will conduct a physical examination and may swab the back of the throat to test for *Streptococcus* bacteria.

How is scarlet fever treated?

If *Streptococcus* bacteria are present, your health care provider will most likely prescribe an antibiotic. It is very important to take the medicine exactly as prescribed and to take all of it, even if you begin to feel better. Never share medicines with others. Your health care provider may also suggest over-the-counter medicines to ease other symptoms, e.g., sore throat pain and fever.

Who is at highest risk for getting scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is most commonly seen in children 5-15 years of age. It rarely occurs in those over 18 years old. The bacteria that cause scarlet fever are more easily spread among persons in close contact.

Can scarlet fever be prevented?

Avoiding contact with infected persons is the best method of preventing scarlet fever. When a child is sick at home, it is always best to keep the child's drinking glasses and eating utensils separate from those of other family members. Always wash these items in hot soapy water. Practicing good personal hygiene, such as washing hands thoroughly and often and covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing, helps prevent many types of infections including scarlet fever and other illnesses caused by streptococcal bacteria.

Is there a vaccine that can prevent scarlet fever?

There is no vaccine available to prevent scarlet fever.

For additional information on scarlet fever and group A streptococcal disease, please visit the following Web sites at:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000974.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/scarlet-fever/DS00917>

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